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13 November 1969

MEMORANDUM FOR THE DIRECTOR

SUBJECT: NIE II-14-69: SOVIET AND EAST EUROPEAN GENERAL PURPOSE FORCES

1. Of the military estimates published annually, II-14 is the largest because it covers such a broad scope of Soviet and Warsaw Pact military affairs. The estimate always includes much detail on hardware, organization of units, and tactical doctrine which is of more use to the Pentagon planner than to higher echelons of the Government. However, the estimate provides the only national military intelligence pertinent to these key strategic issues:

a. Is conventional defense of NATO feasible or must NATO rely on nuclear weapons?

b. Are the Soviets making progress in ASW capabilities which will render Polaris vulnerable?

c. What effect will Soviet military concern for China have on Soviet capabilities against NATO?

2. Regrettably, with respect to our higher level readership, the answers to these questions hang on detailed examination of a myriad of sub-issues. In some respects they cannot be finally answered without net evaluations involving an assessment of US and allied military capabilities, which is forbidden to NIEs. Despite these problems we have made considerable progress this year toward answering some of the key questions mentioned above.

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Soviet Conventional Capabilities

3. The large number of Soviet divisions, their impressive inventory of tanks, and the efficiency of the Soviet mobilization system, all augmented by the East European armies, have created an impression of "overwhelming conventional war capabilities" which is more or less accepted in both US and European official circles. There have always been valid grounds for doubt about this judgment; the Soviets for many years deliberately sacrificed conventional strength in order to prepare for nuclear warfare. In past estimates we have made general references to the weaknesses which resulted from these policies: small divisions, few supporting units, and poor capabilities for conventional operations in Tactical Aviation. Generalized treatment of these matters, however, has had little impact on net evaluations. This year's estimate makes considerable progress on this score, making it much harder for war-gamers to assume away Soviet conventional weaknesses. New evidence and some in-depth analyses by OSR have made it possible to describe in some detail the considerable qualitative superiority of Soviet divisions in East Germany over those which would arrive from the USSR, NATO's advantage in conventional artillery support, and the disadvantage of Soviet reliance upon mobilized civilian truck transport. We have also dealt with the limitations on sortie rates and "dual purpose" roles of Tactical Aviation; worst-case assumptions about these matters in many current net evaluations have obscured Soviet weaknesses in conventional air operations. (See paras. 15-19, 25, 27, 28, 42, 43, and 47.)

Soviet ASW Capabilities

4. In the past we have found it difficult to address this subject with much clarity. Like the "conventional superiority" issue, the ASW problem involves a two-sided evaluation, i.e., Soviet ASW systems versus the Polaris. This year we have been able to coordinate an estimate which neither denigrates Soviet ASW efforts nor downplays the unsolved problems of effective defense against Polaris. Conclusion O is the most definitive agreed judgment on this matter which has thus far appeared in national estimates. (See paras. 146-149.)

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Effects of the Buildup Against China

5. Past estimates have dealt with the general purpose force buildup in the Sino-Soviet border area as a side light to the main issue of the threat to Europe. This year's estimate is better balanced in this respect. It does not, however, come to grips with the effects of the buildup on Soviet capabilities vis-a-vis Europe. There is considerable evidence that the forces opposite China have priority for equipment and personnel (see paras. 125-127) but it is not yet strong enough to convince the community to estimate any change in capabilities against NATO. We can expect this issue to attract growing attention, but we can also reasonably expect clarifying evidence over the next few months.

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